

Minesweepers Begin Preparatory Work Off HaiphongBy **WILLIAM BEECHER**

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 6—The Defense Department announced today that four United States Navy minesweepers had been ordered to begin clearing an anchorage on the approaches to Haiphong Harbor as a preliminary step toward destroying hundreds of mines that have blocked North Vietnamese ports for nine months.

Maj. Gen. Daniel James Jr., a Pentagon spokesman, said that while the United States had not seeded any mines in the area—some 40 miles southeast of Haiphong—it was proceeding as a safety precaution to sweep a fleet of about 25 American vessels that will clear mines from North Vietnamese ports and waterways.

The order to begin sweeping the anchorage, he said, followed the first meeting in Haiphong yesterday between American and North Vietnamese officers arranging the mine removal.

Meanwhile, other military sources said that the Soviet freighter Dalny was unloading about 3,000 tons of wheat flour north of Cat Ba Island into small wooden-hulled boats that were moving the flour to Haiphong. The sources said the

freighter, out of the Pacific port of Vladivostok, had apparently been sent because of food shortages in Vietnam.

The mine-clearing operation is expected to take months.

The usual method of delivery since the first American mines were dropped from the air last May 8 has been to unload at such Chinese ports and transship by rail, road and canal.

General James said the four minesweepers—the Engage, the Force, the Fortify and the Impervious—accompanied by the destroyers Worden and Epperson, had been ordered to clear the anchorage.

He said three more minesweepers—the Enhance, the Illusive and the Leader—had been ordered from Pearl Harbor to Subic Bay, in the Philippines, where the task force is forming and practicing. He said he did not know when the full operation would get under way.

Under a protocol included in the Vietnam cease-fire accord, the United States agreed to clear all mines it had placed in the waters of North Vietnam, by rendering them "harmless through removal, permanent deactivation, or destruction."

North Vietnam agreed to assist in the operation by provid-

ing hydrographic charts as well as maps of minefields laid to shield its harbors.

Pentagon sources said the principal mines dropped in North Vietnamese waters were magnetic, designed to explode when a metal craft passes over, and acoustic, triggered by the sound of engines and propellers.

A primary means of destroying such mines, the sources said, is to have a helicopter

draw a special "sled" that sends signals that should detonate the mines.

Most if not all the mines lie on the bottom, the sources said.

North Vietnam is believed to have emplaced mines tethered on cables. American minesweepers are equipped to drag a device designed to sever the cables. The mines then bob to the surface, where they can be exploded by rifle or machine-gun fire.